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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000313

SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL/IRF, DRL/NESCA AND NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [KIRF](#) [KISL](#) [IR](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: MOROCCO: SHI'A THOUGHTS ON RECENT GOVERNMENT
REPRESSION

REF: A. RABAT 0281

[1](#)B. RABAT 0196

[1](#)C. RABAT 0200

[1](#)D. RABAT 0205

[1](#)E. RABAT 0289

[1](#)F. RABAT 0265

[1](#)G. RABAT 0267

[1](#)H. RABAT 0230

Classified By: CDA Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Representatives from the Iraqi Shi'a Muslim community met with PolOff to recount recent GOM activities targeting Shi,ites following last month's break in diplomatic relations between Morocco and Iran. While the situation is ameliorating, there remain unresolved issues such as the closing of a private Iraqi School in Rabat. Shi'a representatives believe that the school closing was politically motivated and that former Iraqi Ba'athist party members, wishing to undermine the current Iraqi Government, may have instigated GOM action. The Iraqi CDA asked for U.S. help in reopening the school. End Summary.

Moroccan Shi'a Community Members Speak
About Government Anti-Shi'a Campaign

[1](#)2. (C) On April 9, PolOff met with Iraqi businessmen Karim Majed (strictly protect) and Ali Abdulhussain (strictly protect) at the Embassy of Iraq to discuss the Government of Morocco's (GOM) recent campaign against Shi,ites (Ref A). Both Majed and Abdulhussain are practicing Shi,ites and have lived and worked in the Casablanca area for more than 20 years. Although negative Moroccan views toward Shi,ites have ebbed and flowed since 2003, each said that the GOM's recent campaign represented the harshest treatment they have ever experienced in Morocco.

[1](#)3. (C) For more than 27 years, Karim Majed has operated two construction enterprises and an automobile company in Casablanca and employs more than 600 Moroccans. He told PolOff that GOM authorities warned him years ago against Shi'a proselytizing. "They made it clear that Malikite Islam was the only legal Islam that could be practiced in Morocco by Moroccans," he said. Majed was free to practice his personal faith at home with his family. For more than two decades, Majed lived peacefully in Morocco and worshipped in Sunni mosques, while privately celebrating Shi'a holidays at home with his Iraqi Shi'a friends. His family has chosen to suspend celebrating such holidays in light of recent events.

Recent Actions against Shi'a

14. (C) Majed explained to PolOff that the recent government campaign against the Shi'a actually began 2 to 3 months prior to Morocco's decision to suspend diplomatic ties with Iran (Refs B-D and H). According to Majed, he began to receive indirect signals that the GOM was not happy with the Shi'a community. Many of his Iraqi Shi'a acquaintances were being harassed when they went to renew their residence permits. Authorities would ask them if they were Shi'a or Sunni and specifically whether or not they were acquaintances of Majed, a well known Shi'ite in the community. Because of the increased questioning, the group decided not to celebrate Shi'a holidays together as they had done in the past. Majed said that he was not questioned, which he attributed to his being a major employer in the area.

15. (C) Ali Abdulhussain informed PolOff that soon after the Bahrain incident (Refs B-D and H), GOM authorities issued special invitations to 10 Iraqi Shi'a Muslims to come individually to the Moroccan National Security offices in Casablanca. Abdulhussain said that the officials detained them for nine hours, collected phone numbers and personal contact information from their cell phones and questioned them about their involvement with Shi'a proselytizing activities. According to Abdulhussain, authorities treated them like criminals, taking mug shots, talking tough, and indirectly suggesting that they had strong relations with Iran. Abdulhussain added that Lebanese, Iranian and Moroccan Shi'ite Muslims were also questioned but he did not know how

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many.

Background of Shi'a Community in Morocco

16. (C) Embassy sources previously suggested that the Shi'a population in Morocco is very small, less than 3,000 members. Iraqi Charge d'Affaires (CDA) Rast Nouri Shawis reported that there are approximately 2,500 Iraqis living in Morocco and approximately 70 percent of them are Shi'a. Most live in Casablanca, Rabat and Tangier, where they are primarily involved in commerce. Majed and Abdulhussain added that Iraqi businesses are heavily involved in most of the current Casablanca reconstruction. Both Majed and Abdulhussain emphasized that they are not aware of any Iraqi Shi'ites participating in political activities.

Moroccan Media Fuels Fire

17. (C) Abdulhussain opined that during the height of the anti-Shi'a campaign, the Moroccan media seemed to be making matters worse by turning Moroccan public opinion against Shi'a. He accused the GOM of "blessing" this negative campaign because it did nothing to stop it, and the Shi'a were not allowed to present their side of the story to the media. As a result of the media coverage, both men claimed that their business and employee relations suffered because Moroccans began to believe they were evil men working against Islam. Both suggested that the anti-Shi'a campaign is not escalating but stated that if the media campaign continues, it will definitely affect their business.

Saudi Motives Suspected Behind GOM Actions

18. (C) Majed suggested that there may be a Saudi element behind the recent GOM actions against the Shi'a in Morocco to promote sectarian splits (Ref E). Majed also suggested that these recent actions could be a demonstration of GOM power to

the new Iraqi Government. Majed explained that during Saddam,s reign, Morocco received financial benefits from Iraq. However, now that the Iraqi Government is Shi'a dominated, this largess has dried up.

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Seeking U.S. Assistance in Iraqi School ClQing
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¶9. (C) Iraqi School History Professor Dr. Ali Muhsan reported in a follow-up meeting that a local Moroccan court refused to review the Iraqi Baghdad School's petition to keep the school open (Ref A) and failed to give an explanation for its decision. Iraqi CDA Shawis informed PolOff that the Iraqi Minister of Education also wrote a letter to the Moroccan Minister of Education asking the GOM to allow the school to re-open, for at least one month, to complete the school year but there is still no response from the Moroccan authorities. The Iraqi Embassy is seeking the assistance of other Embassies in Rabat with whom it has friendly relations, including the U.S. Embassy, to put pressure on the GOM to reopen the school.

¶10. (C) Iraqi CDA Shawis, Majed, Abdulhussain, and Muhsan all suggested that the Iraqi school closing was politically motivated and was not a religious issue. They believed that former Iraqi Ba'athist party loyalists living in Morocco had a hand in the school closure. Dr. Muhsan opined that these former Ba'athist party members took advantage of the diplomatic strain between Morocco and Iran, creating untrue rumors of Shi'a proselytizing at the school (Ref A), that played into the hands of a paranoid Moroccan Government wanting to ensure respect for Malikite Islam.

¶11. (C) Comment: While we are no longer seeing daily press reports of GOM actions against Shi'a, we remain concerned over the GOM's recent actions against them, as wellas against Christian missionaries (Ref F), homosexuals (Refs G and H) and Moroccan Bahais. The Islamist-oriented Party for Justice and Development has been writing articles praising GOM efforts in these cases. We believe that these events are

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being driven by political pressures ahead of the municipal elections in June. These events demonstrate both the GOM's unwillingness to be politically outflanked and, at the same time, the power of conservative societal elements to inspire repressive government action. End Comment.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Moro> cco

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